PARSON WEEMS

—WROTH

92
W41
c.2

92
W41
c.2

St. Mark's Library
THE
General Theological
Seminary

Chelsea Square · New York
Maryland Diocesan Library
The Memorial Library
of the Reverend Edwin A. Dalrymple.
Whittingham Collection

MARYLAND DIOCESAN LIBRARY,
1106-1108 MADISON AVENUE,
LENDING DEPARTMENT.
Donated, Sept. 1911. No. 55554
WE

1238 We

THE REV MASON L WEEMS
Died –1825

From a print in the possession of D. McN Stauffer. M Inst C.E

PARSON WEEMS

A Biographical and Critical Study

BY
LAWRENCE C. WROTH

THE EICHELBERGER BOOK COMPANY
BALTIMORE, MD.
1911

92
W41
c. 2

190309

COPYRIGHT, 1911, BY
LAWRENCE C. WROTH

The Lord Baltimore Press
BALTIMORE, MD., U. S. A.

I dedicate this book
to the memory of
my brother
Thomas Page Wroth

PREFACE

There needs no apology for writing as fully as the material available will allow the life of that American author whose works for the first half of the nineteenth century were more frequently reprinted and more widely distributed and read than those of any other native writer during the same period. Mason Locke Weems published his first pamphlet in 1792, and in 1800 he brought out his *Life of Washington,* his best known contribution to the literature of his period. From this date until the Civil War, his works were published and republished with a frequency that has a parallel only in the many issues of the modern best sellers, a marked divergence, however, lying in the circumstance that in the case of the latter the necessity for republication generally dies with the same year that sees their first issue. Duyckinck[1] calls Weems the "Livy of the

[1] Duyckinck, G. L., Cyclopædia of American Literature. 2 v. N. Y. 1855.

common people," but this designation errs in its exclusiveness, for he was nearly as much appreciated by the upper classes of society as by the mechanic and the ploughboy. Perhaps the most obvious, although not the most important, claim that he has to our attention is the fact that upon his authority rests the best known of American hero tales—the story of George Washington and the Cherry Tree. His life has never been written with any regard for accuracy and fullness, and this is an attempt to do so within the limits imposed by a seemingly impenetrable veil which covers many of the years of his life and many of his actions and motives.

The absence of the vagabond element from the lives of the masters of American literature distresses many most properly brought up persons. Whitman allowed his natural bent in that direction to become an artificial cult of the unconventional, with the result that he became in a fashion the most conventional of men. Poe had it almost alone of those whose feet are on the summits. The rest of them

have been for the greater part quiet, scholarly men in whom the high lights are dulled or quite obscured by the library dust which envelopes them. The heart that thrills at the thought of Marlowe brawling in a London tavern, or of Villon raking the streets of Paris with his "score of loyal cut-throats," resents the absence of the vagabond, or even the merely unconventional, element from the American Parnassus. On the lower slopes of the classic mount, however, there are found certain ones of this less formal type, and Mason Locke Weems is of the company.

For thirty years there was no more familiar figure on the roads of the Southern States than this book peddler and author who, provided gipsy-like with horse and wagon, his wares and his fiddle, travelled his long route year after year, sleeping in wayside inn, farmhouse or forest, fiddling, writing, selling books, living in the open and learning some new road lore, field lore or wisdom of the woods with each day that passed. He makes a bit of color in an oftentimes dreary landscape.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

It would be difficult for the author to mention by name all of those who have been of service to him in the preparation of this book. It must be sufficient that he acknowledge with gratitude help from many persons in different parts of this country and England, naming only those three whose assistance was of such a nature that it could not pass unmarked. These are Miss Elizabeth Chew Williams, of Baltimore, a great-great niece of Parson Weems; Mr. Walter B. Norris, of the teaching staff at the United States Naval Academy, and the late Mr. Richard D. Fisher, of Baltimore, whose contribution was none the less valuable in that it consisted chiefly of encouragement when that was most needed.

PARSON WEEMS

I
EARLY LIFE

Mason Locke Weems was born October 1, 1759, at Marshes Seat,[1a] the family homestead near Herring Creek in Anne Arundel County, Maryland. He was one of the younger of the nineteen children of David Weems, the chief progenitor of the family in America. This David, his brother James and his sister Williamina, were the children of a younger brother of David,[2] third Earl of Wemyss, the representative of a family which

[1a] In the will of David Weems, the name of the plantation is given as above, "Marshes Seat." In the Rent Rolls of Anne Arundel County it is likewise so called. It is probable that as time went on the name came to be carelessly rendered as "Marshall Seat," for this is how the later generations of the family pronounce and spell it.

[2] As is the case with many early American families there is some uncertainty in the identification of the emigrant ancestor, but the relationship as given in the text is said to be correct by H. H. Bellas, Esq., in his MSS. notes on the Weems or Wemyss family, in possession of Miss Harriet Reynolds, Bradshaw, Md.

traced its ancestry to the Macduff whom Shakespeare has made memorable in his great tragedy. Williamina Wemyss [3] married William Moore, Esq., of Moore Hall, Pennsylvania, and became the mother of a long line of Moores, Cadwaladers, Goldsboroughs, Ridgeleys and Smiths. Her daughter, Rebecca Moore, married Dr. William Smith, a "father" of the Episcopal Church in America, and as Provost of the College of Philadelphia, eminent among the learned men of his day.

David Weems (the Maryland branch of the family soon dropped the ancient spelling of the name) was resident in Maryland certainly as early as 1729, for in that year the farm upon which he is living is bequeathed him in the will of his uncle, Dr. William Locke,[4] a familiar name in the local annals

[3] See Life of Rev. William Smith, D. D. By Horace Wemyss Smith.

[4] Dr. William Locke is said to have been the maternal uncle of the Weems children for whom he provided. His will, in which he speaks of them as "cousins," is to be found in Book 20, Liber CC3, Folio 480, Office Registrar of Wills, Anne Arundel County, Annapolis, Md.

of Anne Arundel County. Family tradition says that Dr. Locke brought David, James and Williamina to America in their childhood and brought them up in his house. However this may be it is certain that he was exceedingly generous to them in the distribution of his property at his death in 1732.

In 1742,[5] ten years after the death of Dr. Locke, the Registrar of St. James' Parish, Anne Arundel County, records in bad spelling and worse English that the rector of All Saints' Parish, Calvert County, married by license David Weems and "Mrs. Easter Hill."[6] One finds this lady to be Hester, daughter of Abell and Susannah Hill, born in St. James' Parish in 1717. It is from the nineteen children of David and Hester Weems that are descended the greater part of those who to-day bear the name in all parts of the country.

[5] Parish Register of St. James Parish, Anne Arundel County, in Maryland Diocesan Library, Baltimore, or copy in Maryland Historical Society Library, Baltimore.

[6] It was David, the son of these two, who married Margaret Harrison, not the elder, as is often stated.

There is a scant supply of facts relating to the boyhood of Mason Locke Weems, for, with the exception of one or two incidents of doubtful authenticity, the whole of his early life is an unknown period in his history. We know, however, from that delightful storehouse of gossip about people, places and things, Bishop Meade's *Old Churches, Ministers and Families of Virginia,*[1] that he was at one time an inmate of the house of a Mr. Jenifer of Charles County, and it is likely that this was the well-known Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer, one of that group of sturdy statesmen and patriots which the Revolution brought out in Maryland. If this surmise is correct, the source of the glowing patriotism of the author of the *Life of Washington* is clear. Weems, indeed, was one of the earliest of those whom we have come in later years to designate as "Jingoes."

Happily enough, the single incident of his boyhood which rests upon good traditional

[1] Meade, William, Old churches, ministers and families of Virginia. 2 v. Phila., 1857. Vol. 2, p. 234 et supra.

authority is one that bears witness to the early formation of a benevolence of character which marked him throughout his later years. Curious as to the meaning of a series of nightly absences, members of the Jenifer family followed him upon one of his regular excursions into the surrounding forest. Coming after some time to a tumble-down shanty, they were astonished to find him within, the center of a group of poor children of the neighborhood to whom he was imparting the rudiments of common learning. Weems' sympathy and patience with the poor and ignorant is always a beautiful trait in his character.

With a few more to his credit, this anecdote is told of him by Bishop Meade in order to offset the impression made by the further account which he gives of this lad grown to manhood. Bishop Meade was an austere, outspoken man, and the picture of orthodoxy in manners and religion. Influenced by the absence of a saving elasticity in the manners of his times, he was unable to allow the good

side of Parson Weems to make atonement for those of his qualities which he felt to be bad. In estimating Weems' character, he was compelled to put in the balance every ounce of Christian charity which he possessed, and in spite of his obvious effort for fair judgment, or perhaps because of it, he succeeds only in leaving us a negatively damning characterization of one whom he was certain to misunderstand. A generation less in bonds to conventionality and seeing events in a longer perspective, studies the life of Weems with a more generous appreciation.

At an early age,[8] probably sometime in his fourteenth year, Weems went abroad to study medicine, and for three years this purpose held him in London and at the University of Edinburgh. What use he made in later life of his acquirements in medicine is absolutely unknown. He is spoken of[9] as Dr. Mason

[8] Allen, the Rev. Ethan, MSS. history of the church in Maryland. 4 v. in the Maryland Diocesan Library, Baltimore. (Hereafter referred to as the Allen MSS.)

[9] Calendar of Franklin papers, No. XXXVIII, 96, Vol. II, p. 460.

Weems many years afterwards, and in certain notes [10] which the writer has examined, it is stated that he served for some months as surgeon on a British ship of war. If this be so it was doubtless his aversion to service against the struggling colonies which brought him home to America in 1776, for it is generally believed and stated that he spent the period of the Revolution in this country. The absence of all clue to his movements, however, during the years of war is the despair of those who have tried to bring the events of his life into orderly sequence. A plausible assumption is that he was engaged in the practice of his profession during these years, but it is an assumption only.

He next appears to view in the year 1782, at which time he returned to England to obtain Holy Orders from the Anglican bishops. Probably because peace had not been declared between England and America, he was forced to travel by way of France, for in March, 1782, the consul at Nantes writes to

[10] Allen MSS.

Franklin[11] for a passport for Dr. Mason Weems[11a] and Mr. Manifold, who go to England on business.

[11] Calendar of Franklin papers. See note 9, above.

[11a] It is this use of the title "Doctor" which makes it seem probable that Weems, during the past few years, had been in a sufficiently active practise of medicine to become generally known as a physician. Of course, the term would not have been applied for any other reason. Even if his intention of taking Holy Orders had been declared, he would not have been called "Doctor" before ordination.

II

HIS ORDINATION

The story[12] of Weems' efforts to obtain ordination in England forms an interesting chapter in the history of the American Episcopal Church. At the close of the Revolution, the idea of the English Church existing abroad other than as a mission conducted by Englishmen was unthought of in Britain save as a theory which was of doubtful practicability. There were no bishops in America, and it was clearly seen there that if the American Church was ever to be anything but a mission dependent upon the Church of England, it was necessary that it should be allowed a separate episcopate and an individual corporate existence. Recognizing this fact,

[12] Bishop White, Memoirs of the church; Hawkins, Missions of the Church of England; Cross, Anglican episcopate and the American colonies; McMaster, History of the people of the U. S.; Foster, Century of American diplomacy; Franklin correspondence; Adams correspondence, etc.

the clergy in America in the colonial era had appealed more than once for a bishop of their own, and while Weems at this later day was striving for the lower orders of the ministry, the Rev. Samuel Seabury of Connecticut was in England begging for consecration to the episcopate. Both of them were met by the unanswerable reply that the law of the realm permitted ordination only to those who could take the Oath of Allegiance to the Crown of England. It was necessary to wait, but in the meantime there were divers agencies working in the interests of the struggling church in America.

Associated with Weems in his appeal for ordination was Edward Gantt, Jr., a young Marylander who afterwards became prominent in the church of his native State. Not daunted by the refusal of the bishops to admit them to orders, they petitioned Benjamin Franklin,[13] then at the French court, for advice in their extremity, but that usually sagacious man was unable to help them. Indeed,

[13] Franklin correspondence, any edition.

his letter of reply contained distinctly poor counsel, and showed that he held a very superficial conception of the requirements of the situation. He suggested that the candidates should make shift to do without regular ordination as they should be forced to do anyhow if the British Isles were to be swept away by the waves of the Atlantic. For a man of his greatness, this letter [14] seems peculiarly inept, although it is written in his usual shrewd and entertaining fashion. It is evident that Apostolic Succession and Historic Episcopate were mere scholastic terms to the great Franklin, churchman though he was.

[14] Here follows an abbreviated form of the last part of Franklin's letter: "If the British Isles were sunk in the Sea (and the Surface of this Globe has suffered greater changes), you would probably take some such method as this; and if they persist in denying you ordination, 'tis the same thing. An hundred years hence, when people are more enlightened, it will be wondered at, that Men in America, qualified by their Learning and Piety to pray for and instruct their Neighbors, should not be permitted to do it till they had made a Voyage of six thousand Miles out and home, to ask leave of a cross old Gentleman at Canterbury; who seems by your Account to have as little Regard for the Souls of the People of Maryland, as King William's

A more practical view of the situation was taken by John Adams [15] at The Hague, for he spoke of the dilemma of his young countrymen to the Danish minister in Holland with the result that in April, 1784, an offer was made by the Bishops of the Danish Church to ordain them by their rite. Adams communicated this offer to Congress and copies of the correspondence were sent to the governors of all the States. Neither in the case of Weems nor of any other American candidate, however, was the offer accepted. It is probable that uncertainty as to how the English Church would pronounce upon the valid-

Attorney-General, Seymour, had for those of Virginia. The Reverend Commissary Blair (applied to Seymour to draw up the charter of a college which by the Queen's grace was to be built in Virginia. Seymour opposed the money grant, and in the argument that ensued between him and Blair, the latter said) that the People of Virginia had souls to be saved as well as the People of England." (The Attorney-General thus replied) "Souls!" says he, "damn your Souls. Make Tobacco."

This letter is dated Passy, July 18, 1784, and it is written in reply to one from Weems and Gantt received two days before.

[15] Bishop White, Memoirs of the church, p. 327 et supra.

ity of Danish orders made the candidates wary of the substitute proposed by Adams, and, moreover, it was felt that ultimately their disabilities would be removed by act of Parliament.

In the hope of liberal action by Parliament, the American candidates were not disappointed, for on August 13, 1784, an Enabling Act [16] was passed which made possible the omission of the " Oath " in the ordination of persons intending to serve in foreign lands. And, finally, after a residence abroad for the purpose, of two years and a half, Weems, on September 5, 1784, was ordained to the diaconate by the Bishop of Chester, acting under the Bishop of London, in the Duke Street Chapel, Westminster, and one week later, the Archbishop of Canterbury admitted him to the priesthood.[17] Among those ordained with him was his compatriot, Edward Gantt, Jr. The companion measure, provid-

[16] Statutes at Large, 24 George III, Cap. XXXV.

[17] Certificates in the Maryland Diocesan Library, Baltimore, in keeping of the Records Committee of the Diocese of Maryland.

ing for the consecration of bishops under the same conditions, failed of passage through Parliament, and it was nearly three years before Bishop White of Pennsylvania was consecrated by the English prelates. In the meantime, Dr. Seabury had gone to Scotland, where in November, 1784, he was elevated to the higher office by bishops of the Episcopal Church in that country.

In November, 1784, was chartered the "Corporation for the Relief of the Widows and Children of the Clergy of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Maryland," [18] and in the list of incorporators appear the names of Mason Locke Weems and Edward Gantt, Jr., their first appearance in any list of clergy of the Diocese. Sometime in the same year, Weems became rector of All Hallows' Parish in Anne Arundel County.

The most difficult part in the preparation of the life of Parson Weems has been the determination of the date and circumstances

[18] Acts of Maryland Assembly. November, 1784.

of his ordination. In 1857, Bishop Meade [19] wrote these words: " . . . a doubt has been entertained whether he ever was ordained a minister of our Church, yet we will take that for granted, and ascribe to him all that is justly due." In the second issue of 1872, he changes the two latter clauses of his sentence to read simply, " yet I have ascertained that to be a fact." Unfortunately, the aspersion of the first issue was only too readily taken up, and that by persons not willing to " ascribe . . . all that is justly due," for since that time there have appeared numerous articles in which either a similar tone was evident or in which the author denied flatly the fact of Weems' ordination, making him out a rogue of the first order. The only reason ever given by the writers for their remarkable position is that his name does not appear in any list of clergy ordained by the Bishop of London. The possibility of his having derived his orders from another bishop seems never

[19] Meade, Old churches, etc.

to have been taken into account. After correspondence and research in this country and Europe, covering a period of nearly two years, the writer learned from a letter in the *Southern Churchman,*[20] written in reply to one of his own, that a descendant of Edward Gantt, Jr., had in his possession the ordination certificates given to his ancestor by the Bishop of Chester and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Communication was entered into with the proper authorities in England with the result that the certificates of Weems' ordination were secured and placed on record in the Maryland Diocesan Library. It has been a particular pleasure to determine finally the circumstances of Weems' ordination, for although one must allow him faults, yet it is difficult to believe him capable of infamy as gross as would have been the false representation of himself as a priest in the Church of God.

[20] Southern Churchman, Richmond, Va. May 21, 1910, p. 20.

III

THE PARISH PRIEST

For the eight years following upon the return of Parson Weems [21] to Maryland after securing ordination, he was one of the most active clergymen in the diocese. He was rector of All Hallows' Parish from 1784 until 1789, and during this incumbency he conducted in the neighborhood a school for girls. He seems to have held no charge during part of the year 1790, although his name continues on the clergy list of the Diocese. He was rector of Westminster Parish in the same county for the two years 1791 and 1792, and he was several times elected to membership on the Superintending Committee for the Western Shore, a committee which in the lack of a bishop exercised a general supervision of the parishes west of the Chesapeake. It is clear from this that he made his person-

[21] Journals of Convention of the Diocese of Maryland, Allen MSS., etc.

ality felt to some degree by his brethren of the clergy.

Fortunately for those who are interested in Weems, we are able to know more of his life as a parish priest in the Maryland of 1785 than the bare outline of the years and places of his service. His neighbor in Prince George County, the Rev. William Duke,[22] was one of those persons who in spite of the comparative obscurity of their lives and the unimportance of their goings and comings, yet deem it desirable to keep a record of the events of each day as it passes. Early in life Duke had been a Methodist preacher, and inspired perhaps, as many of his brethren

[22] William Duke, born 1757, Baltimore County; died 1843, Elkton, Md. Rector of six Maryland parishes. Professor of Languages in St. John's College, Annapolis; Principal of Charlotte Hall School; Academy in Elkton; Convention Preacher; member of Standing Committee of Diocese; published Hymns, an excellent apologetic, a valuable treatise on Maryland religious history and contributed to several religious periodicals. For full accounts of his interesting life, see a sketch by Dr. Ethan Allen in Sprague's Annals of the American pulpit (Episcopal), and an article by the present writer in the Church Standard for June 20, 1908.

were, by the example of John Wesley, he kept for fifty years a diary of his doings and thinkings. The Duke Diary has been saved from the usual mischances of time and carelessness to be accorded an honored old age in the Maryland Diocesan Library. It is a rarely interesting document, both from a human and an historical standpoint, and it has been the fortune of the present writer to find in the course of its badly written, yellowed pages sixty-five places in which is mentioned the name of Parson Weems. Many of the references to him are of neither interest nor importance, but an equal number of them are valuable in that they bring us into touch with the sometime rector of All Hallows' and Westminster parishes during one of the periods of his life about which the least is known.

The first mention of Weems found in the Duke "Diary" is this that follows: "Jan. 5, 1787. Crossed South River with difficulty the wind blowing very hard and as I passed Mr. W——'s Church met him coming out.

It seems he preaches every other Friday night for the Benefit of the Negroes. A charitable Attempt. I hope it will be successful. At his Request I promised to preach for him on the Sunday following."

It is to be feared that in this day the Christian bodies were generally careless of the negroes, and it is a gem in the crown of Parson Weems that here and always he had the spiritual welfare of the neglected race at heart. Ten years after this the garrulous John Davis records in his *Travels in America* a conversation which he held with Weems on this very subject of his ministry to the blacks. He gives this sentence as from the lips of Weems: "Oh, it is sweet preaching, when people are desirous of hearing. Sweet feeding the flock of Christ, when they have so good an appetite." Somewhere, somehow, and in such a degree as fully to atone for other and less pleasing characteristics, Weems had acquired affection for and interest in the poor and ignorant of all races, taking always the rejected of other men to his heart and laboring

for their uplift with large patience and charity. Even William Duke, godly and untiring in good works though he was, described the holding of a special service for negroes as a "charitable Attempt," and implied in the next sentence a doubt as to its success.

According to promise, Duke came on the following Sunday to preach at All Hallows', one of the ancient parishes of Maryland. He stayed for several days thereafter with its rector, and in the course of his visit they rode from house to house in the neighborhood paying social calls on the parishioners. Duke, nursed in religion by Wesley, Coke and Strawbridge, was averse to the point of crabbedness to the card playing, wine drinking and dancing which went on, innocently enough generally, in the Maryland country houses, but we gather that Weems was either more liberal in his views or that he was more adaptable to circumstances. When the former on one occasion condemns even the friendly game of cards, he writes in the "Diary" that night: "I was so unfortunate as to be singular in

that Sentiment," and on the following morning he " had some serious conversation with Mr. W—— on the Subject of Amusement—We agreed in general. But I could not yield to the maxim of assuming the Complexion and entering into the Spirit of whatever Company you happen in—."

These few days which Duke spent with Weems are in all, save details, the type of many later visits of one to the other of them. They were unmarried and nearly of the same age, and in spite of a wide difference in temperament, they had in common many tastes besides the interests of their profession. We find them on sufficiently friendly terms for Duke to reprove Weems for " a fault which he observed in his character," and for anything that is said to the contrary Weems took the reproof in good part. Throughout the " Diary " are entries of this sort: " A good deal of talk with Weems. He drives Jehu-like," or, " Mr. Weems called on me. I took a long and agreeable walk with him." Duke was strict in life and doctrine, a self-taught

scholar, and withal a man of great good sense. In later years he attained a position of no little influence in the Diocese, and although he never had a parish of any especial importance, he was the familiar friend and correspondent of two bishops and of the leading clergy in the Maryland Church. That he could number William Duke among his friends is no small thing for Weems to boast of.

It is something of a surprise to learn that Weems was not popular with the people of the county, and probably even of his own parish of All Hallows', for about the time of his giving up his rectorship there, we find Duke writing of a visit to some friends in the course of which the conversation turned, he says, upon " the duties of ministers and the difficulties of reforming the people. The Rev'd M. Weems was mentioned and the dislike and disapprobation that he meets with. As he is chiefly remarkable for his zeal and industry I could not help attributing the oppo-

sition generally to that diabolical spirit which is enmity against God."

One of the characteristics which Weems retained for long years after he had given up the ministry was his eagerness to preach or pray anywhere and at any time. Deeply earnest in his desire to spread the gospel truth, he was for thirty years of his later wandering life a sort of unofficial itinerant, an occasional missionary. This was his lifelong habit. One day we catch a glimpse of him riding into Upper Marlboro with William Duke, who that night entered in his "Diary" the fact that "Mr. W—— preached in the Ball room." This was twenty years before there was an Episcopal church in Upper Marlboro, but Weems never waited for churches; inn parlor, court house steps, ball room, village green or cottager's kitchen were his churches as often as the buildings regularly consecrated to public worship. An entry from the "Diary" illustrates his perseverance in labors of this sort and his anxiety to serve. He and Duke are speaking and praying in a poor woman's

cottage. The latter thus describes the service: "The old woman's son Eli interrupted us several times. I was sorry that Mr. Weems took so much trouble to satisfy him as it only made him more petulant."

Once, as we learn in a letter from Dr. Claggett to William Duke, his ardor in the propagation of the Faith brought upon him some criticism from his brother clergy. Dr. Claggett complains, almost tearfully that after having asked his advice in the matter, Weems had acted contrary to it and preached to a Methodist congregation in his neighborhood. He proceeds with his plaint: "I have a regard for Weems, his zeal & attention to ye Duties of his sacred office merit esteem; but in proportion as this Zeal & Diligence are applied to the Methodist Interest it weakens us."[23] There was no rigidity in the churchmanship of Weems. To-day he would be classed with the "low" churchmen, or, as he was not unaffected by the critical thought

[23] In collection of MSS. letters in the Maryland Diocesan Library, Baltimore.

of his time, it might be nearer the mark to say that he was one of the first of American "broad" churchmen.

It is generally said that Weems gave up the active ministry for the bookselling business about the year 1800, but it was eight years before this that he first went upon the road as a book peddler. He attended the Convention[24] held in Annapolis in June, 1792, as rector of Westminster Parish, and we learn from the "Diary" that its writer and Weems lodged together during the sessions, and that Weems obtained his and many other subscriptions to a tract which he had lately published. By September of 1792, he had given up his parish in Maryland, and as far as is known he never after this held a regular charge. The authority for the latter date is the "Diary," for Duke, who has just become rector of North Elk Parish, Cecil County, and lives in Elkton, writes as follows: "Went to Church and preached—the Rev'd Mr. Weems came in the mean time. . . . Was sorry to see

[24] Journal of Convention, Diocese of Maryland, 1792.

Weem's pedling way of life, but God knows best by what methods we can most directly answer the designations of his Providence." This can have but one meaning, and that is that Weems had given up his parish and taken to the road as a means of livelihood.

The town of Elkton, where William Duke was now domiciled, lay not far from Wilmington on the highroad from Baltimore to Philadelphia, and at this period of his life Weems appears to have had a great deal of business in these three cities. The consequence was that he passed through Elkton with frequency and regularity, and always in his visits he stopped for a night or a day at the Duke house, either to take advantage of its hospitality, or to discuss one of the many business deals which he continued to have with its master. In this way we are able to meet him in the flesh until the year 1808. Doubtless he had business or expectations of it in Philadelphia, but in connection with his many visits there, it should be remembered that in and near that city lived his first cousins, the

children of his aunt, Williamina Moore. Tradition has it that he was a frequent visitor at Moore Hall, and it may have been through the influence of his relatives that he was finally brought into the employment of Matthew Carey, the active Philadelphia publisher.

In the last eight years of the century, however, he seems to have been much at a loose end, for he is here and everywhere, planning publishing ventures, selling books of his own and others' publishing, and making tentative efforts towards authorship on his own account. He is feeling his way to the successful business and literary activities of his later life. In 1794, Samuel and John Adams of Wilmington printed for him Wilson's *Account of the Pelew Islands,* a book which three years before he had heard William Duke read aloud at the "Wood Yard," the West estate in Prince George County. In the same year he turns up in New York, and on his return he bears a letter from the Rev. Abram Beach,[25] assistant at Trinity Church, to Dr. Claggett,

[25] MSS. letters in Maryland Diocesan Library, Baltimore.

now Bishop of the Diocese of Maryland. In the letter, among other matters of interest to its writer, there occurs this sentence: "Mr. Weems informs me that he intends to publish a volume of Sermons under the Title of the *American Prot't Episcopal Preacher* the Plan which he will have an opportunity to present to you in person, is, I think, a good one—and cannot but wish him success." There is no record of this book ever having been published. In 1796 he brought out the third of his publications of which there is any record, an edition of Franklin's pamphlet, *The Way to Wealth.* Decidedly of the upper class by birth, Weems was nevertheless of the middle class in temperament and sympathy, and one of the many ways that this democracy shows in his life and writings is his almost wearisome admiration of Franklin and his trinity of bourgeois virtues, Industry, Temperance and Frugality.

Weems' efforts during these years could not have been especially remunerative in the gear of this world, for in November, 1795, Duke

writes in his "Diary" after one of his friend's visits: "I wonder at Weems to travel afoot," and now and for some time afterwards, on these occasions, he writes of "walking" a bit on his way with him. Until sometime later in the decade, when he became Matthew Carey's agent for the Southern States, it is probable that he led a poorly rewarded life of labor. On the second day of July, 1795,[28] he married Miss Fanny Ewell, the daughter of Col. Jesse Ewell of "Belle Air," Prince William County, Virginia, and soon afterwards he settled in the then flourishing town of Dumfries in the same county, where he established a sort of base of supplies in the way of a book store. For the rest of his life, Dumfries, and later "Belle Air," were the havens of rest to which he looked forward as the reward of his journeys' ends. He had a large family of children, and it is said that their home life was peculiarly happy. Certainly he was a tender and loving father and husband.

[28] Historian of the Cherry Tree," Walter B. Norris in National Magazine, February, 1910.

BELLE AIR, THE VIRGINIA RESIDENCE OF MASON LOCKE WEEMS.
(Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Charles H. Coe, of Washington, D. C.)

IV

THE BOOK PEDDLER

The Episcopal Church in Virginia fell into popular disfavor after the Revolutionary War. Its glebes and endowments were taken away, and the popular voice cried down its every defence. It was the Church of England, and therefore despicable as were all things English. The consequence was that its membership fell away, its clergy became few and disheartened, and in some places the churches were closed for lack either of priest or people, or sometimes of both. Pohick, one of the four churches of Truro, sometimes called Mt. Vernon Parish, had no minister-in-charge for the last fifteen years of the century. It became the custom to contract with a visiting or a travelling clergyman to hold services here for a month or two, or longer, as the case might be, and the present Historiographer of the Diocese of Virginia [27] has

[27] The Rev. E. L. Goodwin, Fairfax, Va.

seen a copy of one of these contracts whereby a certain clergyman was to serve as *locum tenens* of Pohick Church.

It is most probable that it was through an arrangement of this sort that Weems ministered in Pohick Church at different times for more than two decades, and this is his only ground for styling himself in after years as "Formerly rector of Mt. Vernon Parish." Pohick, before the Revolution, had been the chosen place of worship of George Washington, and doubtless Weems considered it no small advertisement for his *Life of Washington* that its author should describe himself on its title page as having been at one time the hero's rector, with all that such a title implied. He was rather in the habit of putting his best foot forward where the sale of his books was in question, and this is one of the two instances in which the boot upon the said foot was a borrowed one. In the absence, however, of a full knowledge of the circumstances entering into the matter, it is well to regard with charity this apparent perversion

of truth. It is not the least improbable that during his various tenures of Pohick, he was locally regarded as the Rector of Mt. Vernon Parish. As late as the year 1817,[28] Weems in a letter to Mr. Allen, a student of divinity in Alexandria, speaks of not being able to keep his appointment to preach on the following Sunday in Pohick Church, so that his assumption of the title of rector had evidently not aroused a great amount of resentment against him in the parish.

There is evidence in plenty of a local sort that Weems preached at various periods in Pohick Church, and certain passages in John Davis' *Travels in America* show him there in 1801 preaching, and apparently acceptably, to a crowded church. I give some extracts from the pages of the lively Englishman:

"Hither I rode on Sundays and joined the congregation of Parson Weems, a minister of the Episcopal persuasion, who was cheerful in his mien that he might win men to religion. A Virginian churchyard on Sunday resembles

[28] Southern Churchman, June 11, 1910.

rather a race course than a sepulchral ground. The ladies come to it in carriages and the men after dismounting make fast their horses to the trees. I was astounded on entering the yard to hear 'steed threaten steed with high and boastful neigh.' Nor was I less stunned by the rattling of carriage wheels and the cracking of whips and the vociferations of the gentry to the negroes who accompanied them. But the discourse of Mr. Weems calmed every perturbation, for he preached the great doctrine of salvation as one who had felt its power. It was easy to discover that he felt what he said; and, indeed, so uniform was his piety that he might have applied to himself the words of the prophet: 'My mouth shall be telling of the righteousness and salvation of Christ all the day long: for I know no end thereof.'"

* * * * * *

"'How, Sir, did you like my preaching?' 'Sir,' cried I, 'it was a sermon to pull down the proud, and humble the haughty. I have reason to believe that many of your congre-

gation were under spiritual and scriptural conviction of their sins. Sir, you spoke home to sinners. You knocked at the door of their hearts.' "

" ' I grant that,' said Parson Weems. ' But I doubt (shaking his head) whether the hearts of many were not both barred and bolted against me.' "

Weems was an admirer of the preaching of John Wesley, and if one may judge from the words of this witness and from the testimony of his pamphlets which are but sermons enlarged, it is safe to say that his sermons were permeated with that evangelical spirit which set flowing the tears of repentance wherever the early Methodists held their meetings.

In the above extract from *Travels in America,* there appears a hint of something in Weems' conduct which did him disservice with Bishop Meade and certain others who like the Bishop knew only one kind of preaching and one kind of praying. To be " cheerful in his mien that he might win men to re-

ligion " would be considered no great crime in a preacher of modern times, provided always that a proper dignity were maintained. It is in this particular that Weems sinned, according to Bishop Meade who writes that in family prayers his erring brother would present his petitions in such a form that neither " the young or old, the grave or gay, could keep their risible faculties from violent agitation." Whether this was a regular custom with Weems, or whether having once or twice indulged too freely in homely and vigorous allusions in his prayers and so acquired a lasting reputation for irreverence, it is impossible to determine in the absence of other testimony. Certainly there is no trace of anything of the sort in his writings, and the only comment that William Duke ever made on any of his prayers or exhortations was to record that he found one of them " tedious." It is possible, of course, that Weems was guilty of this sort of sacrilege, but it is not the impression that one acquires of him from a close study of his life and writings.

Others of Bishop Meade's memories of Weems at this period are of interest, although they are stories which cast doubt upon his orthodoxy in the faith, or which at the least lay him open to the charge of exercising what the Bishop calls a "spurious charity" in things doctrinal. "On an election or court-day at Fairfax Court-House," writes the church historian of Virginia, ". . . . I . . . . found Mr. Weems with a bookcaseful for sale, in the portico of the tavern. On looking at them I saw Paine's 'Age of Reason,' and taking it into my hand, turned to him, and asked him if it was possible that he could sell such a book. He immediately took out the Bishop of Llandaff's answer, and said, 'Behold the antidote. The bane and the antidote are both before you.'" His crowning impertinence, however, was that time when in the Bishop's own pulpit he "extolled Tom Paine and one or more infidels in America, and said if their ghosts could return to earth they would be shocked to hear the falsehoods which were told of them," a statement which

was doubtless Truth's very image, for to certain of our ancestors Tom Paine was the fulfillment of the Scripture prophecies concerning Antichrist. It sometimes seems that Parson Weems was that peculiar type of clergyman who is born and lives apparently for no other reason than to vex the soul of whatever bishop he may be serving under.

It is obvious that a clergyman who went about the country in a cart, who sold books among which were the works of Tom Paine, and who preached and prayed in a fashion entirely his own, would draw upon himself sharp disapproval from Mr. and Mrs. Grundy. But it is not likely that Weems noticed their averted faces or that he would have cared if he had noticed them. They who dwell in tents, Ishmael's breed, have never been notably sensitive to the opinions, expressed or unexpressed, of the sons of Sarah. Weems was aggressive in business, zealous in religion, tactless and careless of opinion in both. He strode in his hob-nailed boots over a thousand conventions, but if he got his

books sold, found an audience now and then for a sermon or an address, and carried home a good profit to what Bishop Meade calls his "interesting and pious family" at Dumfries, he cared not what cherished ideal of clerical conduct he left trampled behind him.

It has frequently been said that Weems gave up his active ministry because he could not support his family upon the small stipend with which it was the custom of the day and place to reward its clergy. This might have been true but for the small consideration that when he took to the road in 1792 he had no family. The true explanation of his action may lie in the fact that he was the victim of an incurable restlessness. The opportunity offered to gratify his propensity for roaming, while at the same time he might employ himself in a business with a wide sphere of usefulness. He seems to have impressed Duke with the belief that he took to peddling religious and moral literature with the idea of serving his God more acceptably than he was doing as a parish priest, and that gentleman

was not one to be taken in by a canting pretext. Doubtless Weems was sincere in this explanation, but primarily it was because he was born for the road that he took to the road. He liked change and movement. He gave up medicine for the church, the church for the road. He was constitutionally a wanderer. William Duke, himself the most restless of men, rode in and out, endlong and overthwart the state of Maryland, and as often as not in some inaccessible corner he records a meeting with Mr. Weems, then a simple parish priest. Just what their business is, or whether they have any, no man may know. At any rate Weems liked to wander and he liked to sell books, and if any person may be said to have the advantage of keeping his cake and eating it too, it is he who engages in a profitable business the activities of which are in line with his predilections. To live in a van and sell books for bread! What golden dream is this?

His life as a wandering book peddler has become part of the local tradition of many

of the places through which his business used to take him. The legends say that he carried his violin with him on the long journeys which made up the greater part of his later life, and it is pleasant to think of him as having this means of relaxation. Numerous stories are told of his willingness to play for dances, for the negro boys' " hoe down," and once even for a puppet show. Generally the narrator of these tales implies that in them there is something discreditable to their subject. Bishop Meade disapproved of these doings almost as much as he did of the good-natured minstrel's heretical opinions concerning Tom Paine. The stories about his fiddling are so conflicting, so frequently asserted by one and so emphatically denied by others, that it is difficult to say how general a custom this public fidling was with him. It is to be hoped that they are true tales. Surely there is no harm in fiddling. One likes to think of him ready at all times to play for rich or poor, in the " great house " or in the " quarter." This is certain, that if he fiddled for people to dance,

he was equally ready to inveigh upon them shrewdly if they showed vicious inclination. If it was pleasant for those who danced to his playing, it was correspondingly unpleasant for the drunkard or the rake that felt the rough of his tongue. We gather from various sources a sort of composite pen picture of Weems as he appeared to the people of the rural South—a merrily disposed, white-haired man who was ready at a moment's notice to play for you to dance, to sell you an improving book, to pray with you, or to preach at you a sermon which, for the shame of it, you would remember all your life.[28a]

This is to say little of the business side of his life. If his object was to praise God by circulating religious literature through the South, he attained it beyond dispute. It has been asserted that in one year he sold three

[28a] In fairness it should be recorded that the descendants of Weems are positive in their denial of the stories relating to his public fiddling. It is true that these stories are legendary, but they are so persistent, and there is so little evidence of their untruth that it is necessary in the interests of the story to notice them here.

thousand copies of an exceptionally handsome and expensive Bible which Matthew Carey is said to have published with no little uneasiness as to the success of his venture. He sold books for children and books for their elders, prayer books, hymn books, Bibles, philosophical, historical and biographical works—anything, in short, that there was a possible demand for. He circulated no man may tell how many thousands of his own biographies and moral pamphlets, and a great number of books of sermons and philosophical works by standard authors which he published at his own risk. There has been published a letter from him to one of his several employers [29] in which, writing of the sale of Marshall's *Life of Washington,* he advises and discourses so knowingly of the peculiarities of customers

[29] This very interesting letter is to be found in the American Historical Record, vol. 2, Feb. 1873, p. 82. It is worthy of perusal. It is addressed to Caleb P. Wayne, the publisher of Marshall's "Life of Washington." Weems left the service of Matthew Carey about this time (1804), but later, Carey apparently agrees to disagree with his strong-headed agent, and the old relationship is resumed. It was doubtless a mutually advantageous one.

and the ins and outs of the trade that one feels the case to be understated when he says further in the letter: "The world is pleased to say that I have talents at the subscription business." In the same letter he plans for a third edition of one of his own pamphlets, to consist of a thousand copies.

The manner of his selling was not always the same. Without doubt when he had to secure subscriptions to the five-volume edition of Marshall's *Life of Washington,* he went about it in the regular fashion of book agents and authors from time immemorial. Woe to the poor gentleman who admitted him to his house when a project of this sort was afoot, for Weems was not unknown for a certain "Industry & Zeal." When, however, it was merely a question of disposing of a fresh box of miscellaneous works, moral, religious or educational, he would place himself in the portico of the tavern on court day and there expose his wares to the public gaze. We can imagine him so placed, calling his greetings to acquaintances from the outlying parts, ex-

changing a jest with one, a kind word with another, or seizing a third, a possible customer, and overwhelming him with a flood of words relative to the merits of his new stock in trade. It is said that, armed with a sheaf of pamphlets, he would invade crowded tavern bars, take up a favorable position in view of all, and after a few words of good-natured bantering, launch a virile diatribe against the sin of drunkenness and its attendant evils. Then, before his astonished hearers had time to get sulky, he would go around among them and sell a handful of his *Drunkard's Looking Glass* at twenty-five cents a copy, combining by this means philanthropic service and personal profit.

Without doubt the " interesting and pious family " which he maintained in Dumfries and " Belle Air " was supported in comfort and decency. After nearly thirty-five years of life on the road, Parson Weems died in 1825, while on business in Beaufort, South Carolina. A well-founded tradition has it that he died in the utterance of a sentiment which had ani-

mated his life. "God is love," were his last words. He was buried there, but ere long his remains were removed to a corner of the family cemetery on the "Belle Air" estate. It was here that the leisure of his later years had been spent, and it is fitting that his restless, road-worn body should finally be at rest in the beautiful, placid spot which he loved.

V
THE AUTHOR

It would be a mistake for anyone to take up the works of Weems thinking to find in them well-considered historical writing and careful biography. They are of interest to-day principally as literary curiosities, and as with all books of this sort, it is with each reader almost a matter of pre-natal disposition whether or not he will like them or find them dull and flat. If he was born to like Weems as a writer, he will like him in spite of obvious faults, but if his predisposition is to the contrary, no amount of exposition will persuade him that the "historian of the Cherry Tree" is anything but an inaccurate biographer, an extravagant preacher of morals and a saucy fellow who was sometimes inexcusably vulgar in thought or expression.

Doubtless Weems felt that there was a place for his biographical and moral works in

the America which emerged from the War of Independence, for when he began his literary career the country had but lately come out of a successful struggle for liberty, and child-like it was confounding its new possession with that other quality of license, loath to submit itself again to government of any sort. Federal and Democrat were the opposing parties. Jacobin clubs, Tammany organizations and other political associations were forming on every hand, while party hatred ran so high that not even Washington was spared the vilest lampoons. Eighteenth century rationalism, which here became succinctly "French Infidelity," was submerging the intellects of the educated classes, and the unsettled politics of Europe contributed no little to the national uneasiness. The indirect result of all this was a relaxation of the moral fibre of all classes, and the country stood in need of those who could tell it who were its truly great men and why they were great, and to ding in its ears that the Ten Commandments had not been rescinded by the Declaration of Independence.

This was what Weems tried to do by preaching, by praying and by biographical and moral writing.

The first published work of Weems is generally said to have been the *Philanthropist* in 1799, but thanks to certain entries in the Duke "Diary," an earlier publication than this can be named, although, unfortunately, there are to be found no details of the little book in question. Just before he gave up his active ministry in the Diocese of Maryland, he attended the annual convention at Annapolis, and William Duke writes as follows of some of the happenings of these days and others later in the month. "June 1, 1792. Walked into the country and lodged with Mr. Weems and Mr. Coleman. Subscribed Weems' proposals for 2 books and paid 1/10." "June 29. I see Weems' publication of *Onania* is in a good many hands. I am afraid rather as a matter of diversion than serious consideration." And next day he proceeds: "Weems has incurred a good deal of ridicule as well as serious blame by his odd publication."

This date, June 1, 1792, places the beginning of Weems' literary career seven years earlier than has been done heretofore by his biographers. He published in 1799, as has been said, a political tract called the *Philanthropist,* and as far as is known these two are the only writings of his that saw type before the publication of his *Life of Washington* in 1800, an event which may truly be called his literary debut. Aside from their undeniable merit, there are additional reasons which should be given in explanation of the popularity of the books and pamphlets which he now began to produce in quick succession to one another. The Revolution had left an impressionable people who immediately entered upon an era of generous hero worship, and a man who could add fuel to their ardor in this would be sure of a hearing from all classes. Then, too, it was no small thing in his favor that he was his own publisher and his own distributing agent. But the most important reason for the magnitude and distribution of his audience is the fact that he found no rivals in

his own particular field of endeavor. And this is said with no intention of depreciating the quality of his work.

The generation of Weems' literary activity, approximately the years 1790-1820, was a sterile period in the production of books for young people or for the less cultured of their elders. Of native writers, at least, scarcely one offered anything fit for the reading of children, and even in England the list of books for young people and in the least suitable for them was painfully short. In his own country Weems was a pioneer in what has since become a great industry, the writing of books for boys.

The grimly mysterious tales of Charles Brockden Brown, the essays and novels of James Kirke Paulding, the comedies of Royall Tyler and the *belles lettres* of Washington Irving were for the pleasing of a higher intellectual taste than the day and place could claim for its average reader. Cooper had not yet begun the writing which was to inaugurate a new era in American letters. When, there-

fore, Weems appeared to the shopkeeper, the artisan, the ploughboy and the children of all of them, with his stirring lives of Washington and Marion, written in language of the simplest, without any attempt at subtlety or originality of thought, and in a style which is the despair of a more conscious writer, he was acclaimed as a national benefactor. For his own generation, he was the most widely read of American writers. The number of editions of his *Life of Washington* is variously estimated from forty to seventy, and in a day when books were passed from hand to hand to a greater extent than now, this one must have reached a host of readers.

The Civil War made new heroes, and it and its results changed the country from lad to man. The consequence has been that Weems is almost unknown to the generation which has grown up since the great conflict between the States. Not a year ago, however, this writer found a newly printed issue of the *Life of Marion* on the shelf of a country store, and he knows of a contemplated new

edition of the *Life of Washington*. If an author's fame be measured by the publisher's memory of his work, Weems has attained a share of the shining bauble sufficient to lift him completely beyond the class of minor writers in which his merits place him.

VI

THE BIOGRAPHIES

In December of 1799 died George Washington, who to many of his contemporaries was the archetype of statesman, soldier and gentleman, while on the other hand to a large number of people, he stood for everything that was the opposite of these connotations in mind, manners and morals. Weems was of the former class, and in an outburst of sincere hero worship he wrote, and published on February 22, 1800, a short biographical sketch of the great general and president. His was not the first " life " of Washington that appeared, but it was so far the best and most readable that a new and enlarged edition was called for immediately. For the rest of his days he was collecting new material for the successive enlargements and embellishments of the work which, from an anniversary ser-

FRONTISPIECE OF WEEMS' PAMPHLET, "GOD'S REVENGE AGAINST GAMBLING." REDUCED.

[*See page 92.*]

mon, became his most important contribution to literature.

We owe chiefly to the biographies by Marshall and Ramsay the picture which we have of Washington as the cold and colorless statesman and man of affairs, but it must be confessed that it is Weems who has made his name almost a synonym for youthful priggishness. His life of the hero of the Cherry Tree story was written chiefly for the youth of the land that they might have before them always an example of perfection in conduct, but it needs only reference to such a book as *Sanford and Merton* to become convinced that the eighteenth century ideal of manners in boys was not ours. That he was unaware of his offense is evident from the fact that in one of the later editions of the book he declares in the preface his intention of humanizing one who already lived in the popular imagination as a sort of demi-god.

Not by any means the most worthy, but certainly the best known of American hero tales is the story of George Washington and his

mutilation of the Cherry Tree.[30] It is asserted, generally carelessly and without any thought upon the subject, that Weems was father and mother to this famous anecdote as well as its sponsor, and no one may deny the assertion. It is only fair, however, to say that no really good reason has ever been given for holding this view, and no evidence has ever been brought forward in support of it. On the contrary there is something to be said for the authenticity of the anecdote. The story is probable in every detail, and it is well known that Weems was assiduous in the collection of Washington anecdotes of every sort. Moreover, through his wife's kinship with the Washington family, he had every opportunity for learning these anecdotes, if any existed, from authoritative sources. He knew Washington personally, corresponded with him, and in company with their common friend, Dr. Craik, stayed at least once with

[30] For a full and interesting discussion of the Cherry Tree story, see "Historian of the Cherry Tree," W. B. Norris, National Magazine, February, 1910.

him at Mt. Vernon, and he was intimate with the Reverend Lee Massey who was Washington's rector and associate for many years. These things, of course, may mean nothing. They are given only to show that it was entirely possible for Weems to have heard the Cherry Tree anecdote from some one close to its hero. It is quite within the pale of probability that when Weems gave as his authority for the story the same "excellent lady" who had told him others of her memories of the youthful hero, he was speaking sober truth.

Even if the story be wholly invented by Weems, he has done a real service to the youth of the nation. It is questionable, of course, as a matter of literary ethics to lay an invented anecdote to the charge of one's hero, but possibly the good parson thought that a striking example of truthfulness would be of value to the American boy, wherefore he invented a story containing one. He has made the best-known story of American childhood one that teaches by great example the telling

of the truth whatever befall. Who may say that this story, true or untrue, has not had an influence on the national character?[30a]

Weems has been accused of a general fabrication of all his Washington anecdotes. Whether or not there is any foundation for this will probably never be known, as it is a matter likely to baffle the research of scholars. In the case of one at least of the best remembered of them, it is established beyond doubt that he brazenly transplanted it from another book, a fact which makes it difficult to defend him from the accusation of literary dishonesty. But true, or stolen, or invented, this much is to be considered, that they are good anecdotes of their sort and the only ones that we have pertaining to the youth of George Washington.

The literary style of the *Life of Washing-*

[30a] Lincoln tells of having borrowed Weems' *Life of Washington* and read it during his hard-working boyhood. Moreover, he left it in a hiding-place where the rain entered and sadly damaged the book. He was compelled to work still harder for a while to pay the owner for the ruin which had resulted from his carelessness.

ton and others of the works of Weems is worthy of some consideration, for a dull or a badly written page in these books is a rarity, and this statement is made advisedly and with deference to Henry Cabot Lodge's [21] characterization of his style as " turgid, overloaded and at times silly." His writing is embellished with anecdotes, figures of comparison, and appropriate historical, classical and scriptural allusions. The language is simple, the sentences uninvolved, the vocabulary varied and the whole inspired by that something which we call " style," that spirit which makes a piece of writing live and move.

He has grave defects as a writer of English. His figurative language is sometimes grandiose in the manner of his age. He frequently indulges in a species of fine writing exasperating to the critical mind, and his use of the epic where plain prose were better spoils many a passage in his books. He was one of the lesser writers of the fag end of an

[21] George Washington. By Henry Cabot Lodge. (American Statesman Series.)

age which preferred Mr. Alexander Pope to William Shakespeare, and which was so deafened by the roar of Ossian in its ears that it could not hear Burns the Gauger singing immortal odes in his Scottish gin shops. It was an artificial age and Weems partook of its faults, but there was in him sufficient literary virtue to make his books live in the affection of his countrymen for more than a generation after his death. Discredited by historians and his books supplanted by those of later and more authoritative biographers, it is his style which has kept him from oblivion. Since Weems' death this nation has given birth to several heroes, but there has arisen no biographer to make their lives the common property of every household in the land. There have lived and died Lee and Lincoln, Jackson and Grant, and each of these has been written about time and again, but none of them has had a biographer in the sense that Weems was the biographer of Washington. And this is true not because he is an accurate historian or a painstaking biographer, but because he tells

his story with a contagious enthusiasm which fixes itself in the reader's memory.

Weems was first of all a preacher, and his style exhibits the marks of his calling, that peculiar fluency of language which is the possession of one who does a great deal of extemporaneous speaking. He was well read in the classics, he knew his Shakespeare, and it is said that he could recite from memory the Book of Common Prayer and a vast portion of the Holy Scripture. It is not necessary to look much further for an explanation of his lively, sometimes breathless, narrative style. He wrote in the straightforward, unstemmed form of address which is the use of every earnest preacher of moderate oratorical ability, the language and rhetorical style of a man who must say much in a restricted time, and who to express his thought is driven to the use of nervous, racy and direct language. Moreover Weems had for a heritage the " unstinted English of the Scot," and he lived in an age which was not ashamed of eloquence, the generation in which every school-

house rang with the wildest oratorical flights essayed by even the gentlest of lads. In his writing, the reader never loses sight of the eloquent preacher and orator.

The simile which is quoted here is one that Weems in various forms frequently employs. It is undoubtedly grandiloquent, but it is appropriate and expressive none the less for that reason. There are many of us, indeed, who confess to a shamefaced liking for this sort of bombast. It is pleasant now and then to meet a man who is not afraid to let himself out, one who knows not the use of the word "reserve" in literary composition. "As when a mammoth suddenly dashes in among a thousand buffaloes, feeding at large on the vast plains of Missouri; all at once the innumerous herd, with wildly rolling eyes, and hideous bellowings, break forth into flight, while, close at their heels the roaring monster follows. Earth trembles as they fly. Such was the noise in the chase of Tarleton . . . . from the famous field of Cowpens."

The following anecdote is as good an ex-

ample as may be found of the sort which illumine his pages, and which make it impossible to charge him with dullness, whatever his other faults may be. "Tarleton was brave, but not generous. He could not bear to hear another's praise. When some ladies in Charleston were speaking very handsomely of Washington,[22] he replied with a scornful air that, 'He would be very glad to get a sight of Col. Washington. He had heard much talk of him,' he said, 'but had never seen him yet.' 'Why, sir,' rejoined one of the ladies, 'if you had looked behind you at the battle of Cowpens, you might easily have enjoyed that pleasure.'"

When he is not in a Homeric mood his battle pictures, howbeit lightly sketched, are generally done with a good deal of spirit and enthusiasm. They are not good historical sources, but they are eminently readable. Take, for an example, his description of the defense of Charleston: "'Well, General Moultrie,' said Governor Rutledge, 'what do

[22] Colonel Washington, not the Commander-in-Chief.

you think of giving up the fort?' Moultrie could scarcely suppress his indignation. 'No man, sir,' said he to Lee, 'can have a higher opinion of the British ships and seamen than I have. But there are others who love the smell of gunpowder as well as they do; and give us but plenty of powder and ball, sir, and let them come on as soon as they please.' His courage was quickly put to the test; for about ten o'clock, on the 28th of June, in the glorious 1776, Sir Peter Parker, with seven tall ships formed his line, and bearing down within point-blank shot of the fort, let go his anchors and began a tremendous fire. At every thundering blast he hoped fondly to see the militia take to the sands like frightened rats from an old barn on fire. But, widely different from his hopes, the militia stood their ground, firm as the Black-jacks of their land; and leveling their four-and-twenty pounders with good aim, bored the old hearts of oak through and through at every fire. Their third broadside carried away the springs on the cables of the commodore's

ship, which immediately swung around right stern under the guns of the fort. 'Hurra! my sons of thunder,' was instantly the cry of the American battery, 'look handsomely to the commodore! now my boys, for your best respects to the commodore!' Little did the commodore thank them for such respects; for in a short time he had 60 of his brave crew lying lifeless on his decks, and his cockpit stowed with the wounded. At one period of the action, the quarter-deck was cleared of every soul, except Sir Peter himself. Nor was he entirely excused; for an honest cannon ball, by way of a broad hint that it was out of character for a Briton to fight against liberty, rudely snatched away the bags of his silk breeches. Thus Sir Peter had the honour to be the first, and I believe the only Sans Culotte ever heard of in American natural history."

This is informal writing, but it at least has the merit of life and animation. He goes to the other extreme in describing the Battle of Saratoga, but it is not to the reader's loss that

the epic fire burnt within the honest parson for a moment or two:

"The riflemen flew to their places, and in a few moments the hero[33] was cut down. With him fell the courage of the left wing, who, being now fiercely charged, gave way, and retreated to their camp. But scarcely had they entered it, when the Americans, with Arnold at their head, stormed it with inconceivable fury; rushing with trailed arms through a heavy discharge of musketry and grape shot. The British fought with equal desperation. For their all was at stake; the Americans, like a whelming flood, were bursting over their intrenchments; and hand to hand, with arguments of bloody steel, were pleading the causes of ages yet unborn. Hoarse as a mastiff of true British breed, Lord Balcarras was heard from rank to rank, loud-animating his troops; while on the other hand, fierce as the hungry tiger of Bengal, the impetuous Arnold precipitated his heroes on

[33] The British General Frazier, shot by Arnold's picked riflemen.

FRONTISPIECE (COPPER PLATE) OF WEEMS' PAMPHLET, "GOD'S REVENGE AGAINST ADULTERY." REDUCED.

[*See page 94.*]

the stubborn foe. High in air, the encountering banners blazed; there bold waving the lion painted standards of Britain; here the streaming pride of Columbia's lovely stripes —while thick below, ten thousand eager warriors close the darkening files, all bristled with vengeful steel. No firing is heard. But shrill and terrible, from rank to rank, resounds the clash of bayonets—frequent and sad the groans of the dying. Pairs on pairs, Britons and Americans, with each his bayonet in his brother's breast, fall forward together faint-shrieking in death, and mingle their smoking blood."

Next in merit and importance to Weems' *Life of Washington* stands his *Life of General Francis Marion,* a work which was published under the reputed authorship of Peter Horry. In this book the author is accused of the same sort of unveracious anecdotage as in the *Life of Washington,* but William Gilmore Simms was of a contrary opinion, for he wrote in the preface of his own biography of

the famous partisan leader that " Mr. Weems had rather loose notions of the privileges of the biographer; though, in reality, he has transgressed much less in his *Life of Marion* than is generally supposed." But even if we accept Mr. Simms' statement, and allow Weems to have been more trustworthy than usual in this work, yet it is not as a study in biography that we turn to it. Its charm lies in the fact that of sober history and biography the author has made an unusually entertaining historical romance. Simms called it " a delightful book for the young." It is more than this; it is a delightful book for anyone that will read it.

One of Marion's companions in arms was General Peter Horry, a stout soldier and an eminent citizen of South Carolina. Weems persuaded this personage to turn over to him material which he had collected with a view to writing the life of his great leader and friend, and it is doubtful if the bluff, plain soldier was not much relieved to shift the responsibility of the undertaking to a more practised

writer. He was unfeignedly displeased, however, when the book appeared and its title page proclaimed him as the author, for he declared that he could not recognize his own sober notes in the form which they had taken in the hands of Mr. Weems.

It is certain that the book was entirely of Weems' authorship, and what his motive was in disclaiming this connection with it, is, and will ever be something of a problem. Whether it was simply that he wished to give his book the better commercial chance which it would have under the name of the widely known old hero, or whether he had some agreement with the General which the latter in his indignation repudiated, it is difficult to say with certainty. At any rate his action was questionable enough to bring a storm upon his head in the form of spirited protests from the outraged Horry, who endeavored to assuage his mortification and anger by a series of bitter letters. Weems replied that he had enlivened his collaborator's material and written a " military romance." General Horry might as

well have saved the paper upon which he wrote his denunciatory letters, for a second edition of the book was soon brought out in which there were no changes made either in the manner of presentation or in the name of the author. In later editions, the work was credited to " General Peter Horry and M. L. Weems," but this is the only concession that was made, and the book has been as widely known as " Horry's *Life of Marion* " as by any other signification.[24]

The preface to the celebrated " military romance " in which General Horry is represented as giving in the first person his reasons for writing a memoir of his friend, must have been amusingly true to life. It has been suggested that the reason for Horry's disgust with the book and its author was the uncanny cleverness with which here and there throughout the work Weems drew the character of the rough-mannered but stout-hearted old soldier and gentleman. It was a splendid bit of

[24] See Wm. Gilmore Simms, Views and Reviews, for an account of this literary feud.

characterization, which fell just short enough of caricature to be decent.

A feature in the *Life of Marion* which is especially pleasing to the reader, and which must have been one of the reasons for the great popularity of the book in South Carolina, is the amount of space which the author devotes to the words and deeds of his secondary characters. In this respect it is a memoir of Marion's men as much as of the wily "Swamp Fox" himself. He portrays the valorous feats of Sergeants Jasper and Macdonald, of Newton and a score more non-commissioned officers and privates, and he digresses to tell of the suffering and hardship endured by the non-combatant Whigs during the British and Tory ascendancy of South Carolina. The battles of Marion were fought largely within the borders of South Carolina, and his men were largely made up of natives of that State. The book is consequently, for the South Carolinean, much about home folks. It is the "Roll of the Battle Abbey" of that commonwealth.

The attacks, retreats and daring raids in which Sergeant Macdonald and his horse Selim are the chief figures make this earliest of American historical romances a book of delights for the most critical. The author has preserved anecdotes and stories of achievement of Marion and his paladins which have become a part of our Revolutionary tradition. His book is an American *Mort d'Arthur,* and if one were to begin a detailed quotation of the vigorous and happy descriptions of deeds of arms which it contains, he would never have done. A few selections must suffice to give an idea of the zest with which Weems tells a story.

Marion captures an encampment about the fires of which he finds the British drinking, fiddling and playing cards. Hear Weems tell of an incident of the night. "One of the gamblers (it is a *serious truth*), though shot dead, still held the cards griped in his hands. Led by curiosity to inspect this strange sight, *a dead gambler,* we found that the cards which he held were ace, deuce and jack.

Clubs were trumps. Holding high, low, jack and the game, in his own hand, he seemed to be in a fair way to do well; but Marion came down upon him with a trump that spoiled his sport, and non-suited him forever."

It seems that the potent and seductive beverage known as " apple brandy " was dangerously popular with the American troopers, and Weems closes a chapter dealing wholly with disastrous blunders caused by overindulgence in it with the following incident. While foraging near Georgetown, South Carolina, six young men of Marion's force met an old Tory whose most valuable possession was a bottle of the favorite drink. He was relieved of it, and each of them, the story says, " twigged the tickler to the tune of a deep dram." The relation continues:

" Macdonald, for his part, with a face as red as a comet, reined up Selim, and drawing his claymore, began to pitch and prance about, cutting and slashing the empty air, as if he had a score of enemies before him, and ever and anon, roaring out, 'Huzza, boys! damme, let's charge!'

" ' Charge, boys! charge!' cried all the rest, reining up their horses, and flourishing their swords.

" ' Where the plague are you going to charge?' asked the old Tory.

" ' Why, into Georgetown, right off,' replied they.

" ' Well, you had better have a care, boys, how you charge there, for I'll be blamed if you do not get yourselves into business pretty quick: for the town is chock full of red coats.'

" ' Red coats!' one and all they roared out, ' red coats! egad, that's just what we want. Charge, boys! charge! huzza for the red coats, damme!'

" Then, clapping spurs to their steeds, off went these six young mad-caps, huzzaing and flourishing their swords, and charging at full tilt into a British garrison of three hundred men!!

" The enemy supposing that this was only our *advance,* and that General Marion, with his whole force, would presently be upon them, flew with all speed to their redoubt,

and there lay, as snug as fleas in a sheep-skin. But all of them were not quite so lucky, for several were overtaken and cut down in the streets, among whom was a sergeant major, a stout greasy fellow, who strove hard to waddle away with his bacon; but Selim was too quick for him: and Macdonald with a back-handed stroke of his claymore, sent his frightened ghost to join the MAJORITY."

In both the *Life of Washington* and the *Life of Marion,* Weems is in the main dependable in his accounts of the principal movements and actions of the war. His descriptions of the battles, though brief and highly colored often by his enthusiasm and extreme partisanship, are generally far from misleading. It is probable that he drew his information for the military part of his works from the gazettes and other semi-official sources, and the principal events in the lives of his heroes are also presented truthfully and carefully. There cannot be two opinions of the value of the service of that man who tells in a language understood

of the people his country's history and the lives of its great men. And this holds true even if it shall be proved that he has embroidered these writings with details undeniably picturesque but of uncertain origin.

The *Life of Franklin* is a less important book than either of those which we have spoken of. To begin with, a good half of it, in the early editions, is simply the oft-printed and reprinted " Autobiography " of the great philosopher and statesman. Weems should have written a good biography of Franklin. The words of Poor Richard, the philosopher of the middle class, were always on his lips, and he never wearied of pointing out the greater prosperity which was visited upon the thrifty Pennsylvanians than seemed possible for the easy going Southerners to attain. Moreover he had engaged in pleasant personal correspondence with Franklin at the time of his struggle for Holy Orders when the then Ambassador to France had good-naturedly tried to be of service to him. In

spite of this predisposition to write a good biography of him, he yet in some way fell short of success in his attempts to do so. The old buoyancy and impulsiveness is missing.

The later editions of the book are entirely by Weems, although in the first half of it he has done little more than turn the "Autobiography" into the narration of a third person. Taken as a whole, the book is only moderately entertaining. Whether it is the absence of something in Franklin himself, or whether a statesman and a scientist needs a different sort of biographer from the gossipy, moralizing Weems it is difficult to say, but it is clear to the most cursory reading of it that the *Life of Franklin* scarcely escapes mediocrity.

The *Life of Penn* is another of Weems' less successful works, being merely an enlarged moral treatise sprinkled with scanty biographical and historical details. It is obviously intended for the delectation of youth, and the reader who finds the prosy anecdotes

of the youthful Washington unpalatable had better not touch the *Life of William Penn,* for a good third of it consists of fatiguing, smugly pious dialogue between the boy Penn and his mother. Another third is given over to moral disquisitions from the mouths of various persons, and the rest to more or less dependable history and biography. There is an appendix of Penn's *Maxims.*

The only natural and likable figure in this book is the outraged father of the hero. The old admiral rages without avail against the fanaticism of his son, and one cannot but feel sympathy for him in his failure to understand the peculiarities of the Quaker temperament. The scenes between William and the sturdy old gentleman are the most interesting as they are the best done of any in the book.

One of his outbursts should be quoted, illustrating as it does the sane point of view of the normally good man. The father is adjuring the son not to throw away his many opportunities for worldly advancement by adhesion to a fanatical sect, and he cries out in

his bewilderment: "But why, in the name of God, can't you be good and happy as a *great* man, as well as a *mean* one; and by dressing like a gentleman as well as like a monk? Can Tom Loe have made such a blockhead of you, as to make you believe it a sin to wear a suit of clothes in the fashion?" And again: "Can they be such fools as to think that religion has anything to do with the color and cut of people's clothes?" The reader's sympathies throughout the argument are undisguisedly with this irate representative of unregenerate man.

The one extenuation for page after page of pietistical dialogue is that in their fabrication, Weems is intensely in earnest and intensely anxious to be of service in setting a high ideal for American children. When he writes in terms of exaggerated tenderness of Lady Penn's love and care for her son, one feels that he has in mind his own children and their upbringing. He was the kindest and most devoted of fathers himself, so that when his overdone piety fails to touch an answering

chord, the reader is ready to forgive him, knowing the excellence of his intention.

It would not be justice to Weems to say that his *Life of Penn* is not a good book. It is not a good biography for the reason that one-half of it is dialogue which had its birth in the brain of the author. It is, however, a good book, for whenever Weems put his pen to paper a certain enthusiasm and zest were born which made readable conversations and disquisitions which in another writer would be "as dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage." In him they are alive in spite of themselves, and once more style has its triumph.

VII
THE PAMPHLETS

It is often said truly that Weems' pamphlets are among the curiosities of American literature, but it would be doing their author an injustice if anyone were left with the impression that they were no more than this. For in the generation of their birth and greatest circulation, these coarse, stinging invectives against the grosser vices influenced their readers to a degree that would have been impossible of accomplishment in quiet, dignified sermons or tracts, in whatsoever trenchant or logical form their arguments might have been put forth. Contemporary writers allow them to have been notable agents for good in the hands of the half educated, emotional classes to whom their crudity of manner and matter was no hindrance to an appreciation of the very obvious lesson in the author's mind and heart.

The earliest of the tracts, and undoubtedly a very interesting one if a copy of it could be found, is *Onania,* the "odd publication" which, according to William Duke writing a few days after its appearance in June, 1792, brought upon its writer "a good deal of ridicule as well as serious blame." The nature of the subject makes discussion of the tract undesirable here, but one can imagine Weems' contempt for those who ridiculed him, and the indignant sarcasm with which he must have answered those who blamed him for his plain speaking in the cause of public health and morals. He was a hundred years before his time in this particular form of endeavor.

For many reasons, the most remarkable of the Weems' pamphlets is that one called *God's Revenge against Gambling,* and this is so not because it is the most flambuoyant and lurid of them in design, but rather for the contrary reason. It probably lost in effectiveness on account of its comparative pallor, but this loss was its gain from a literary standpoint. It is the most finished and pleasing of

the tractates which claim Weems as their author. It is closely reasoned on the purely ethical grounds of the gambling question, and it contains passages which attain almost to nobility of expression. The dialogue, a favorite device with Weems, has dramatic movement and a certain intensity of feeling. Some of the " cases " illustrating the evil results of gambling are presented with a pathos not devoid of delicacy, a more convincing method than the dulling bludgeon strokes which follow thick and fast in the form of " cases " in others of the pamphlets. A good example of this method occurs in the dialogue in which he has been lauding the excellencies of a well-known gentleman of Maryland. The contrast, of course, is evident mechanism, but it is none the less effective for being so.

" But please to stand by, Mr. Goodloe Harper, for here pushes forward a gambler, I suppose, but so rumpled and bedirted both in hair and hide, that but for his size, I should as lieve take him for a mole as a man. Well, sir, who are you? "

"A man, sir."

"But are you sure of that, sir? for, to be candid, you come in so 'questionable a shape' that I am put to a stand."

"Yes, I *am* a Man, or rather a *mad-Man*. I am the *thing,* sir, they call a gambler."

"O! Well then, sir, go on for heaven's sake, for you look full well enough for a gambler; please, sir, to go on."

And with this introduction the unfortunate gambler relates with no little effect the story of a fall from comfortable circumstances to his present sad estate. Of all the sermons of Parson Weems which have been preserved, this against gambling is the single one that has kept its appeal for the more sophisticated reader of a later generation.

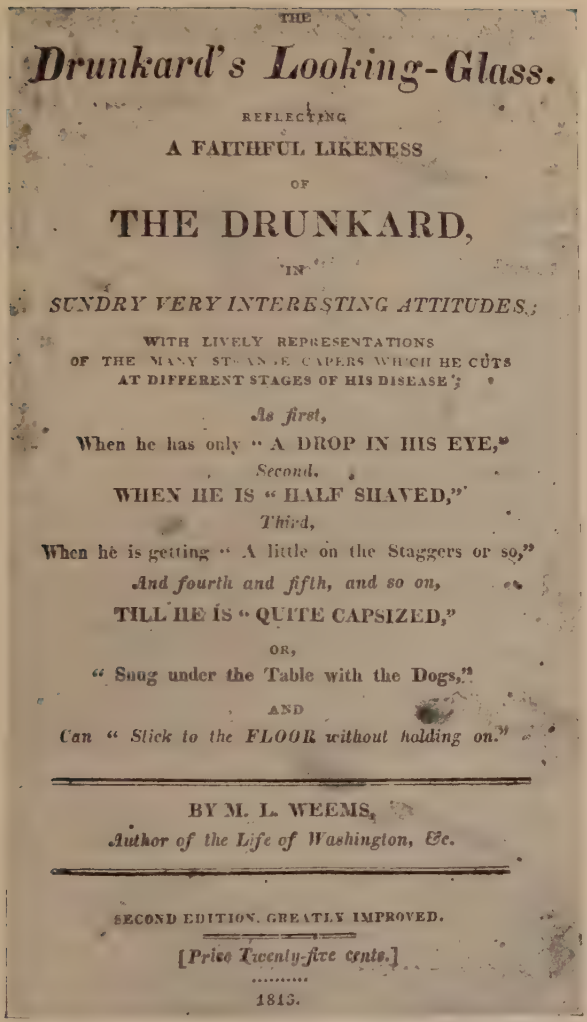
In *God's Revenge Against Adultery,* the author writes with some circumstance of the errors and punishment of two unhappy women, whose names, it is to be hoped, were altered before their disgrace was thus advertised in a pamphlet which had an enormous sale in all parts of the country. The practice

of inculcating virtue by presenting " horrible examples " of vice, here reaches the limit of its possibilities. The effect is in some measure destroyed for the critical reader by the author's extravagance, for when he is called upon to curse and bewail the villainy of man, a greatly different attitude of mind is induced in him by the bathos of attendant circumstances. This is decidedly the most unpleasant of his writings but there is no reason for doubting the statement that it was the most effective of them.

The *Drunkard's Looking Glass,* besides being a powerful sermon in which John Barleycorn is given a sad drubbing, is on account of the slang of the period with which its pages are studded, a document of some interest to the antiquarian. We learn, for instance, that the equivalents for present-day phrases indicative of the stages of intoxication were something like these: first, the drunkard has a " drop in his eye," then, he becomes " half shaved," and so finally he is " quite capsized," or " snug under the table

with the dogs." He also becomes " swipy," and is " cut," or " cut in the craw." This is not the only age which revels in nice distinctions in the progress of the effects of " Demon Rum."

There are passages throughout this early bit of temperance reform literature which are of a degree of coarseness indescribable by comparison to anything in printed English. The language which from every page cries out to one is the sort that may be heard from a crew of drunken stevedores in the height of their inebriation, and this statement is rather rough on the stevedores at that. Weems was a close observer of the people with whom his roving life threw him in contact, and he has here described them so truly that the reader is almost convinced of their physical nearness. The author's depiction of a man in the " stupid or torpid stage," with all the loathsome consequences, is a wonderful and at the same time a disgustingly crude bit of realistic writing. So much is this so that in spite of the admiration which it compels from the stand-


THE

Drunkard's Looking-Glass.

REFLECTING

A FAITHFUL LIKENESS

OF

THE DRUNKARD,

IN

SUNDRY VERY INTERESTING ATTITUDES;

WITH LIVELY REPRESENTATIONS
OF THE MANY STRANGE CAPERS WHICH HE CUTS
AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF HIS DISEASE;

At first,

When he has only "A DROP IN HIS EYE,"

Second,

WHEN HE IS "HALF SHAVED,"

Third,

When he is getting "A little on the Staggers or so,"

And fourth and fifth, and so on,

TILL HE IS "QUITE CAPSIZED,"

OR,

"Snug under the Table with the Dogs,"

AND

Can "Stick to the FLOOR without holding on."

BY M. L. WEEMS,

Author of the Life of Washington, &c.

SECOND EDITION, GREATLY IMPROVED.

[Price Twenty-five cents.]

1815.

PHOTOGRAPHIC REPRODUCTION OF THE TITLE PAGE OF WEEMS' POWERFUL AND REALISTIC PAMPHLET AGAINST THE PREVAILING VICE OF HIS GENERATION. REDUCED.

point of literary effect, one does not care to read a second time the page which contains it.

In *God's Revenge Against Murder,* the evil influence of low environment and of the parental neglect of children alike conspire to the undoing of a young South Carolinian and the hapless wife whom he kills with shocking brutality. It is like the other pamphlets in its description of sordid wretchedness, and like them, too, in its undoubted power, but except that it possesses some local historical interest, there is little more that need be said about it.

The *Philanthropist,* an olive branch held out to opposing "Adamsites and Jeffersonians," has an interest of its own in that it has to do with the stirring political questions of that day. Its sane treatment of the issues won for it a general commendation. *God's Revenge Against Duelling* and the *Bad Wife's Looking Glass* are much of a type with the other moral dissertations which have been described.

It is a pleasure to turn from these barbaric

and in the main successful attempts to badger people into an observance of the Decalogue to that one of Weems' pamphlets which is a type of his jocularly earnest nature. The title, indicative of its style and contents, is *Hymen's Recruiting Sergeant; or the New Matrimonial Tat-too for Old Bachelors.* As early as 1805 [35] we find him suggesting to a publisher that a third edition of the pamphlet consisting of 1000 copies would be profitable, and at as late a date as 1840, new editions were being issued by different publishers in various parts of the country.

In this seriously meant entreaty to the unmarried to enter upon and enjoy the felicities of the "honorable estate," he exhorts in humorous fashion the "Citizen Bachelor" to find himself a wife, quoting Scripture, paraphrasing the Book of Proverbs and calling loudly upon Common Sense to support him in his crusade against the state of bachelordom. The letter dedicatory is typical of the lively,

[35] American Historical Record, vol. 2, Feb. 1873, p. 82.

almost frolicsome, style of the book, and at the risk of taking up too much space it is copied here, for surely there is nothing in our literature quite so curious as this little book.

"TO ALL THE SINGLES, WHETHER MASCULINES OR FEMININES, THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES.

"DEAR GENTLES, I am very clear that our *Yankee heroes* are made of at least, as good stuff as any the best of the beef or frog-eating gentry on the other side of the water. But neither this, nor all our fine speeches to our President, nor all his fine speeches to us again, will ever save us from the British gripe or Carmagnole hug, while they can outnumber us, *ten to one!* No, my friends, 'tis population, 'tis *population alone,* can save our bacon.

List then, ye bach'lors, and ye maidens fair,
If truly you do love your country dear;
O, list with rapture to the great decree,
Which thus in Genesis you all may see:
'Marry, and raise up soldiers, might and main,'
Then laugh, you may, at England, France and Spain.

" Wishing you all, the hearing ear—the believing heart—and a saving antipathy to apes,

" I remain yours, dear Gentles,

" In the bonds of

" Love and Matrimony,

" M. L. WEEMS."

It is evident that the cry of " race suicide " is as old as the nation.

Unfortunately, many of the apposite anecdotes and parallels which the author calls to his service in this pamphlet are not suitable for quotation, and this is not because there is any vicious intent in his relation of them, but for the reason that for ill or good this age has elected to close its ears to frank mention of the elemental facts of life. Weems finds three prime reasons for matrimony—pleasure, rosy health and prosperity, and upon each of them he enlarges in a number of delightful essays, drawing in high colors the contrast between the bachelor's " silent supper," " cold sheets " and generally disconsolate condition, and the comforts and delights which are the

lot of the benedict. One may not say which is the better reading, Master Burton's melancholic views on the "miseries of marriage" or these "sweet persuasives to wedlock" of good Parson Weems.

These are the works of the celebrated "Parson Weems."[36] We are not troubled to find for him a place in the family of American authors. He is one of those that will not exactly fit in with any group of them, whether arranged by period, by section or by similarity of product. His biographies are read to some extent to-day, three generations after his death, and it is not unlikely that they will continue to be read to a similar extent as long as people are interested in the beginnings of

[36] For readable accounts of Weems' life, see Duyckink's "Cyclopædia," Arthur P. Gray in Hayden's "Virginia Genealogies," also Hayden in the same work, Ludwig Lewisohn in the Charleston News and Courier, August 30, 1903, and an all too short article, by W. B. Norris, in National Magazine, February, 1910. The late Paul Leicester Ford was, at the time of his death, engaged upon a monograph on Weems, which he intended to issue in connection with his own book, The True George Washington.

this nation. And if his works were to be utterly forgotten, the evidence of his existence would still be seen in the legendary history of the nation. A great number of the stories of the Revolution which to-day are the heritage of the American child were, if not actually first told by Weems, at least preserved from oblivion and sown broadcast in the hearts and memories of the people by means of his writings. This man wrote the earliest biographies of four of the nation's heroes, and wrote them so well that he moulded many of the national legends; to an age that needed more of his kind, he preached virtue and decent living in language that gripped and seared and sickened; and finally after his death himself became the center of a legend. This is the excuse for writing of Mason Locke Weems.

INDEX

A

Adams, John, 22
Adams, Samuel and John, printers, 38
Age of Reason, 47
All Hallows' Parish, 24, 27, 29, 31, 33
All Saints' Parish, 13
Allen, Mr., 43
American Prot't Episcopal Preacher, 39
Annapolis, 36, 59

B

Bad Wife's Looking Glass, 97
Beach, The Rev. Abram, 38
Beaufort, S. C., 55
Bellas, H. H., 11
"Belle Air," Prince Wm. Co., Va., 40, 55, 56
Biographies, The, 64

C

Cadwaladers, descendants of Williamina Wemyss, 12
Canterbury, Archbishop of, 21, 23, 26
Carey, Matthew, 38, 40, 53
Charleston, S. C., 73
Cherry Tree anecdote, 6, 65, 67
Chester, Bishop of, 23, 26
Claggett, T. J., Bp. of Md., 35, 38
Coleman, Mr. (the Rev. John), 59
Corporation for the Relief of Widows, etc., 24
Cowpens, Battle of, 72, 73
Craik, Dr., 66

D

Danish Church, Bishops of, 22
Danish orders, 23
Danish minister, 22
Davis, John, *Travels in America*, 30, 43, 45
Diary of William Duke, 29, 31-34, 36, 39, 40, 46, 59, 92
Dunkard's Looking Glass, 55, 95
Duelling, God's Revenge Against, 97
Duke, The Rev. Wm., 28, 31-34, 36-38, 46, 49, 50
Duke Street Chapel, Westminster, 23
Dumfries, Va., 40, 49, 55

E

Edinburgh, Univ. of, 16
Elkton, Md., 36, 37
Enabling Act, 23
Ewell, Fanny, 40
Ewell, Jesse, 40

F

Fairfax Court House, 47
Franklin, Autobiography of, 86, 87
Franklin, Life of, by M. L. Weems, 86, 87
Franklin, Benjamin, 18, 20, 21, 39, 86, 87
Franklin correspondence, 19, 20
Franklin papers, Calendar of, 16, 18

G

Gambling, God's Revenge Against, 92
Gantt, The Rev. Edward, Jr., 20, 22, 23, 26
Goldsboroughs, descendants of Williamina Wemyss, 12

H

Hague, The, 22
Harrison, Margaret, 13
Herring Creek, 11
Hill, Abell, 13
Hill, Hester, 13
Hill, Susannah, 13
Horry, General Peter, 77-80
Hymen's Recruiting Sergeant, 97

J

James, St., Parish, 13
Jenifer, Daniel of St. Thomas, 14

L

Lincoln, Abraham, 68
Locke, Dr. William, 12, 13

Lodge, Henry Cabot, 69
London, Bishop of, 23, 25

M

Macduff, 12
Marion, General Francis, 82
Marion, Life of, by M. L. Weems, 62, 77, 78, 80, 81, 85
Marshall, John, 53, 54
" Marshall Seat," 11
" Marshes Seat," 11
Massey, The Rev. Lee, 67
Meade, Wm., Bishop of Va., 14, 15, 45, 46, 49
" Moore Hall," 12, 38
Moore, Rebecca, 12
Moore, William, 12
Moores, descendants of Williamina Wemyss, 12
" Mt. Vernon," 67
Mt. Vernon Parish, 41, 43
Murder, God's Revenge Against, 97

N

Nantes, France, 17
Negroes, Work among, 30
North Elk Parish, 36

O

Oath of Allegiance, 20
Onania, 59, 92

P

Paine, Tom, 47, 48
Pamphlets, The, 91
Parliament of Eng., 23
Penn, William, 88, 89
Penn, Admiral, 88
Penn, Lady, 89
Penn, Life of, by M. L. Weems, 87, 88, 90
Penn's *Maxims,* 88
Philadelphia, 37
Philadelphia, College of, 12
Philanthropist, The, 59, 60, 97
Pohick Church, 41, 42, 43
Protestant Epis. Church, 12, 19
Protestant Epis. Church in Va., 41

R

Revolutionary War, 17
Reynolds, Harriet, 11
Ridgeleys, descendants of Williamina Wemyss, 12

S

Saratoga, Battle of, 75
Seabury, Samuel, Bishop of Conn., 20, 24
Simms, W. G., 77, 78, 80
Smith, Wm., D. D., 12
Smiths, descendants of Williamina Wemyss, 12
Swamp Fox (General Marion), 81

T

Tarleton, Colonel, 72, 73
Trinity Church, New York, 38
Truro Parish, Va., 41

U

Upper Marlboro, 34

W

Washington, Colonel, 73
Washington, George, 6, 42, 58, 64, 65-71
Washington, Life of, by Marshall, 53, 54, 65
Washington, Life of, by Ramsay, 65
Washington, Life of, by Weems, 5, 14, 42, 60, 62, 63, 68, 77, 85
Way to Wealth, 39
Wayne, Caleb P., 53
Weems, David, 11, 12, 13
Weems, David, Jr., 13
Weems, James, 11, 13
Weems, Mason Locke: birth, 11; early life, 14; medical career, 16, 18; ordination, 19-26; parish priest, 28; publishing ventures, authorship, 38; marriage, 40; book peddler, 41; as a preacher, 44; death, 55; author, 57; biographical works, 65; pamphlets, 91; place in literature, 101
Wemyss, David, 3d Earl of, 11
Wemyss, Williamina, 11, 12, 13, 38
Wesley, John, 29, 45
Westminster Parish, Md., 27, 29, 36
White, William, Bishop of Pennsylvania, 24
Wilmington, Del., 37
" Wood Yard," 38

190309
Wroth, Lawrence C.
92
W41
c. 2
Parson Weems

190309
92
W41

St. Mark's Library
The General Theological Seminary
175 Ninth Avenue
New York, N. Y. 10011

Please stamp date in left column, write your name legibly in center column and leave right column blank. Deposit circulation card in slot marked 'Circulation cards'.

There is no date due, but books must be returned promptly upon request. Do not lend books charged to you to others.
You are responsible for them.

T5-AGR-423